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A N T I D O T E
F O R T H E
R I S I N G A G E,
A G A I N S T

Scepticism and Infidelity.

B E I N G

A collective View of the Argument in
Proof of a Divine Revelation.

Methodically arranged,

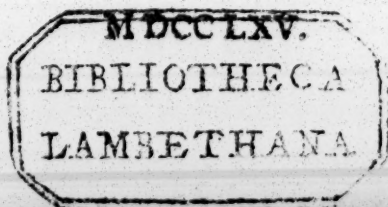
In a SERIES of EPISTLES, from
CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

*I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life:
no Man cometh unto the Father but by me.*

JESUS.

L O N D O N:

Printed for T. LONGMAN, in Pater-noster-Row.



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DEDICATION.

To - - - - Esq;

S I R,

I Need not acquaint you with the occasion of my drawing up these epistles; but should apologize both to you and the public, for their open appearance in this form; especially when there are already so many defences of revelation extant. Perhaps the best reason which can be assigned, is, the argument's being brought into the compass of a small volume; wherein its force is collected with
the

the fidelity of a man, and the freedom of a christian. May I add, the author's ideas and conceptions of the evidence, will have a claim to *originality*, if nothing else should. Whether this publication shall prove acceptable, or not ; it is the best attempt to prevent the spread of infidelity, in the power of

Your obedient

CREDENS.



A scale of the propositions, which are
illustrated in these Epistles.

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FIX.*



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E P I S T L E I.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

*Inattention and immorality the primary sources
of unbelief.*

S I R,

SINCE you desire I should, in my own way, collect and calculate the weight of evidence on the side of revelation, and account for the several occasions of scepticism and infidelity;—in compliance with such request, and with a view of contributing, all I can, to the advancement of the interests of a rational and consistent profession of christianity, I begin with what the great LOCKE has considered as the primary sources of unbelief. Allow me the liberty of a large pertinent citation from him;—
“ there are, says he, a sort of people who
“ *want proofs*, not because they are out of
“ their reach, but because they *will not use*
B “ *them* :

2 *On the evidence for revelation.*

“ *them*: who, though they have riches
“ and leisure enough, and want neither
“ parts nor other helps, are yet never the
“ better for them. Their hot pursuit of
“ pleasure, or constant drudgery in busi-
“ ness, engages some men’s thoughts else-
“ where ; laziness and oscurancy in general,
“ or a particular aversion for books, stu-
“ dy, and meditation, keep others from
“ any serious thoughts at all : and some
“ out of fear, that an impartial inquiry
“ would not favour those opinions which
“ best suit their prejudices, lives, and de-
“ signs, content themselves without exa-
“ mination to take upon trust what they
“ find convenient and in fashion. Thus
“ most men, even of those who might do
“ otherwise, pass their lives without any
“ acquaintance with, much less a rational
“ assent to probabilities they are concerned
“ to know, though they lie so much within
“ their view, that to be convinced of them
“ they need only to turn their eyes that
“ way. But we know some men will not
“ read a letter which is supposed to bring

“ them



“ them ill news ; and many men forbear
“ to cast up their accounts, or so much as
“ think upon their estates, who have reason
“ to fear that their affairs are in no very
“ good posture. How men, whose plen-
“ tiful fortunes allow them leisure to im-
“ prove their understandings, can satisfy
“ themselves with a lazy ignorance, I can-
“ not tell : but methinks, they have a low
“ opinion of their souls, who lay out all
“ their incomes in provisions for the body,
“ and employ none of it to procure the
“ means and helps of knowledge ; who
“ take great care to appear always in a
“ neat and splendid outside, and would
“ think themselves miserable in coarse
“ cloaths, or a patched coat, and yet con-
“ tentedly suffer their minds to appear in a
“ pie-bald livery of coarse patches, and
“ borrowed shreds, such as it has pleased
“ chance, or the country taylor (I mean the
“ common opinion of those they have
“ conversed with) to clothe them withal.
“ They who are blind, will always be led
“ by those that see, or else fall into the

4 *On the evidence for revelation.*

“ ditch; and he certainly is the most sub-
“ jected, the most enslaved, who is so in
“ his understanding.

“ But some will say, the greatest part
“ of mankind are, by a necessity of their
“ condition, subjected to an unavoidable
“ ignorance in those things which are of
“ the greatest importance to them; and
“ that they have no other guide but acci-
“ dent and blind chance to lead them to
“ happiness or misery.

“ This would surely in idea be an ex-
“ travagance, since God has furnished
“ every individual man with faculties and
“ powers sufficient to direct him in the
“ way he should go, if he will but seriously
“ so employ them. No man is so fully
“ taken up about the means of bodily
“ support, as to hinder attention to the
“ principle and motive to his action, or
“ to the first and supreme end of his ex-
“ istence. Nevertheless, a thousand ex-
“ cuses are invented to divert from these
“ attentions; and whatever will contribute
“ most to an indulgence of the faulty pas-
“ sion,

“ sion, is greedily embraced and cherished.”

Nor can we wonder that * *deism* should have so wide a spread, when we once duly consider the above observations of that great master of reasoning, whose abilities did extend to such an amazing metaphysical investigation of the powers, operations and acquisitions of the human understanding. It is a fair account he gives of one source of infidelity, since men are wont to want *proofs*, not because they are out of their reach, but because they will not make use of them.

Indeed men of pleasure, men under constant dissipations of thought, the lazy, the loose, the sensual and immoral, are very likely to become sceptical, and to discredit gospel evidence. This class of libertines have very great occasion to entrench themselves in their infidelity; since it is not in the least probable that a man should be fond of a system of laws, which condemn

* N. B. The terms *deist* and *deism* are used to denote an unbeliever, and unbelief in revelation.

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all his favorite indulgencies, and most awfully threaten his vice and impiety. The better to keep himself in countenance, he will have it, that the gospel-moral is much too refined for human nature; and that the example of piety and virtue, set by the author of the christian religion, is rather to be admired, than to be imitated; for his part, he chuses to imagine the whole to be a romance; and that there never did exist so sublime and perfect a character: but if it was a fact, he must be much more than a man, and therefore could not be an example which shall oblige us to an imitation.

Whenever he objects, with any airs of confidence, to the gospel evidence, you may be soon informed of his having read either *Spinoza* or *Hobbs*, *Shaftesbury* or *Bolingbroke*, *Collins*, *Tindal* or *Woolston*, or else some later advocate for infidelity; what he has learned from them, is, to laugh at the story of *Balaam's ass*, or *Sampson's locks*; to ridicule his *foxes* and *firebrands*, and to throw off a pointed raillery at *prophecy* and *miracle*. Verily, these gentlemen

men are never found serious or grave enough to enter into the argument, or to explore the nature and force of evidence with any kind of decent address; but they are qualified to crack a witty jest, or let fly some piece of humour; and if not this, another glass or two will put an end to any farther consideration about the matter.

These men may affect to call themselves *deists* and *free thinkers*, but in fact, they are of that class of mortals who *do not think at all*; their dissipations are habitual, their inattentions to truth and its evidence are shockingly dreadful! however, you must allow, sir, that they, by no means, have the least right to class with true deists; *i. e.* with men who believe a God, reverence his name, and obey his will; they are rather of the order of unthinking sceptics; and methinks it cannot do them any injustice, should we rank them among practical atheists; *i. e.* men who live *as without God in the world*.

Upon the whole, so far from any reputation being given to the christian profession by persons of an immoral or vicious

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life, these men, by refusing to make such profession, evince the best proof they are able to give of their modesty ; they do also thereby avoid that most detestable character of *hypocrite*, whose final portion shall be in the hottest hell.

We presume, therefore, that neither you, nor any one else, can misconstrue this description of the source of *deism* ; since it is not intended to insinuate that all who disbelieve a revelation are of this indolent, slothful cast, and immoral, vicious complexion.

I am, with esteem,

Yours, &c.

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E II.

From CREDENS to SCEPTICUS.

Popery a wide occasion of infidelity.

S I R,

IT would raise one's astonishment, if any thing from a popish pen was capable of doing it, to find, in a plea for the toleration of popery, all the grimace of concern about the spread of modern deism; " the
 " rising generation, says he, are now forming their principles on the writings of
 " *Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Argens*, and the
 " philosopher of *Sans Souci*; to whom may
 " be added a large catalogue of authors of
 " our own country. In *France* grave magistrates already celebrate, and the first
 " courts of judicature echo the praises of
 " *Julian* and *Dioclesian*; calculations are
 " made, and the period pretended to be
 " fixed, when christianity is to be no more.
 " The powerful weapon of ridicule is employed not against popery alone, but to

“ render contemptible the whole *Jewish*
 “ and *Christian* revelation. If the roman
 “ catholic religion is most visibly losing
 “ ground every day in *France*, where it is
 “ supported by the inclinations of the so-
 “ vereign and the royal family, by an opu-
 “ lent and most numerous priesthood, by
 “ the laws and whole frame of the mon-
 “ archy; there certainly cannot be any rea-
 “ sonable apprehension of its increase in
 “ *England*, where it can never expect any
 “ of those supports.”

The artful priest must allow us to take
 some freedoms with his very plausible ad-
 drefs. He, like the author of his reli-
 gion, has an ability of transforming him-
 self, upon any needful occasion, into an *an-
 gel of light*; he can, very devoutly and pas-
 sionately, plead his painful apprehensions
 about the spread of modern deism. But,
 I would ask, does he once consider, that
 in proportion to the adventure which any
 of the *French*, *Italians*, or other catholics
 make of the use of reason, or as they are
 bold enough to form a judgment for them-
 selves

selves of the nature of evidence, popery cannot do otherwise than become the subject of the most pointed ridicule; inso-much, that in what degree soever they may have been led, by that superstition, to contemptuous opinions, either of the Jewish or of the Christian revelation, it could only be occasioned by those misrepresentations which are given of them by popery. Let the holy inquisition, the holy wars, or crusades, as described by a *Tasso*; or let the holy massacres of *Paris*, *Ireland*, and *Mexico*, as well as the various consecrated assassinations, bear a full and flagrant testimony. *On the contrary*, in proportion to the spread of sound and true philosophy, or to the disposition which men have of exercising the most sacred and unalienable rights of private judgment, *popery* ever has, and ever must appear extremely absurd and ridiculous; and where this is the case, men plainly perceive that it matters not at all what are the inclinations of a court, or of a prince, what the civil constitutions of a country, what the system of laws, or how-

ever numerous and opulent a priesthood ; since none of these things can in the least alter or change the eternal establishments of truth and nature ; for what if those in power affect to call *black, white* ? what if they are so extravagantly whimsical as to affirm, that bread which is baked and can be eaten is transmuted, by some priestly *hocus pocus*, into a real living human body ? yet, with minds manumitted from the vassalage of an implicit faith, and a blind obedience, black will be black, and bread will remain bread, notwithstanding all the powers of priestly consecration. The whole authority of the church, *in alliance with the state*, all the ability of the boasted successors of *St. Peter*, is not equal to the change said to be wrought in the natures of things.

But will it follow, that because *popery*, when contemplated by the eye of reason, or of true philosophy, does appear, what it really is, *viz.* a most extreme perversion of the divine system of truth and mercy, and an outrage committed on the understandings of mankind ; that therefore the *French-*

man

man or the *Italian* ridiculing popery, is any kind of proof of his contempt of the gospel-constitution? so far from it, an abhorrence of popery appears to be needful to all the intents and purposes of true religion. This will be evident to every man, who sees that religion is a reasonable service, and wholly personal, that its province admits of no authority, but that of God, to give law to conscience; and that so far as men are found exercising dominion, prescribing and imposing articles of faith and a ritual of worship, so far religion is excluded the whole system. But that this prescribing and imposing spirit is of the very essence of popery, every man may be assured, who examines with any care into its constitution. The rising generation who form their principles in opposition to popery, are not, for that reason, enemies to the christian religion, but become thereby the more promising members of society; and so far from giving the well informed mind any painful apprehensions, will administer very great occasion of joy. In the name of truth and of God, let such
deism

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deism every where spread and prevail ; since it will indicate to us, that the darkness of ignorance is going off from such parts of the deluded world ; and that the long-benighted of mankind are emerging into more open day.

As to the apprehensions of an increase of popery in *England*, which cannot but be alarming to the friends of a free, political, or civil constitution ; we are well assured that all the success of popery in *Britain*, must depend upon the wantonness, levity, and luxury of the age ; the general dissipation of thought, and the assiduous labours of *enthusiasts* to propagate a reverence of mystery ; together with what occasion a political administration may possibly have for the officious principles of *non-resistance and passive obedience* ; with which principles, that superstition does openly profess to inspire all her members.

Moreover, when we advert to the long and wide spread of the popish superstition, we cannot at all wonder, that the *Mahomet-an imposture* became so very successful ; or, that

that *Jew* and *Pagan* have had such confirmed prejudices and objections to the christian name and profession. *Popery*, in one word, has been the stone of stumbling, and rock of offence, to all the unbelieving world; and yet *popery* professes a panic about the spread of deism. How farcical in the eyes of,

Your humble servant,

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E III.

From CREDENS to SCEPTICUS.

Our scriptures are said, by the unbelievers, to have been corrupted and interpolated at coming to us through the hands of popery.

S I R,

IT must be confessed, that if the *genuineness* and *integrity* of the new testament writings could not be maintained, their authority, as a sacred canon, would be of no value. But it so happens, that from their internal structure, we can be assured of their divine excellence and perfection. And that they could not come to us through a corrupt canal of conveyance, we can, with great confidence, conclude from the following facts;—“ the wide spread of the
 “ apostolic and evangelical writings; the
 “ early versions of those writings into
 “ various languages; the polemical
 “ writings of christians down from the
 “ apostolic age, wherein the defences and
 “ apologies

“ apologies they have made, render it morally impossible that the new testament canon should, in any age, be interpolated and corrupted. It must therefore have been preserved in its genuineness and integrity unto this day; nor can a time ever come, in which there will be an opportunity given to designing men to alter the sacred canon.”

Learned and critical writers have shewn, that among the various lexions of those writings, not one divine doctrine, maxim, precept, or promise, has thereby been affected. The whole moral remains pure and unmixed, uniform and unlimited in its obligation; and moreover, the motive or excitement to obedience is most powerful and pleasing. The system is intirely formed *upon the love of God and our neighbour*. There is not so much as one single argument drawn from the good things of this world, to countenance or urge the the profession; but christianity was first propagated in direct opposition to all worldly prospects of advantage, to every political principle and maxim. Nor only so,

so, but it yet remains the same moral, spiritual, and heavenly profession, notwithstanding the wild and unnatural scheme of fancifully connecting religion with civil policy, and annexing secular advantages to the fictitious church system. So a popish writer, in his *Trial of the Roman Catholics of Ireland*, has observed, “ that hence it is, generally speaking, that in all countries the people who are really of no religion, are professedly of the religion that is countenanced by the government *.” This observation was needful, in order to shew with universal evidence, that the divine canon remains uncorrupted and pure, notwithstanding the christian profession has so generally become *pagan*.

And yet, some have formed disagreeable ideas of the new testament canon, from a silly imagination, that those writings have been transmitted to us through the canal of popish conveyance, as if we

* The same has been said also by *Montesquieu* in his *Spirit of Laws*.

were beholden to that superstition for our divine rule. Papists themselves have had the confidence to say this; as in *The Considerations on the Penal Laws*; “the clergy of
“the established church received the sacred deposit of the old and new testaments from their roman catholic predecessors.”—And to the same purpose, it is common with them to ask the protestant, *where was your religion before Luther?* as if before it had had no existence at all, if not in popery. But the answer is easy and ready, the religion of the protestant had its origin in those new testament writings, where popery never had any kind of existence, except in the prophetic description of *the man of sin*, and the apocalyptic whore of Babylon. We cannot therefore owe to the popish superstition any sort of obligation for those sacred writings, either of the old or the new testament. We cannot for the following reasons: there have been great numbers of genuine copies in other hands, besides what were in the possession of papists, in all ages of christianity since the beginning

ginning of that apostacy, and in all countries, as well where popery has been disowned and despised, as where it has been professed, for many rational and consistent christians have been found in popish kingdoms and states; consequently, it can be no other than an affected arrogance in any papist to pretend his church has been the *conservator* of our sacred canon; since he is not able to shew that his superstition has any kind of countenance in those writings.

Whereas, on the other hand, could it be proved, that the papal church has been the original conveyancer of these records to the protestant, numberless suspicions would arise about the truth and divinity of those writings, and our jealousies would be violent and incurable. There verily is but one consideration that can reconcile us to a persuasion that the romish church has ever retained any copies of the sacred scriptures, without mutilating or corrupting those copies, and that is, they knew there were great numbers of copies in other hands;
and,

and, at the same time, they kept the canon out of sight of the people, and delivered to them no other sense of its doctrines than what would be most convenient for their own political purposes, and best calculated to promote their worldly systems. No matter how moral, spiritual, and heavenly its teachings, whilst preserved in the library of the *vatican*, and not to be touched but by the priestly fingers.

But since the papist will boast of his conferring on us this divine benefit, I would advise him to tell the *Jew*, "that he also is
" indebted to his roman catholic predecessors,
" for, for the sacred deposit of the old tes-
" tament scriptures."—As rank as this absurdity would appear, at the very first view, it is not more ridiculous than the debt of obligation which he would fasten upon the protestant. It ought then to be shewn, before we make them any such acknowledgment, that there was a time when there was no other profession of christianity, but the papal; and, at least, that at such a time no one had any genuine copies of the old and
new

new testament, but themselves. Till this is done, the bold assertion will deserve no credit, but the claim should be considered as extremely arrogant and impudent.

More than this, we may be absolutely certain, that if the papal church had ever had an opportunity of garbling and corrupting those writings to the purpose of supporting their own superstition, they would have done it. So that those scriptures, which we now have, could never have reached our hands; the thing is so evident, that to a thinking mind it will appear as a kind of ocular demonstration; for what practices popery has been guilty of, is obvious to every impartial discerning eye, in their *Rhemish Testament* and *Psalter*. Nor can we much wonder at their wantonness, when in the very structure of their devotion, they openly pay much greater homage to a LADY than they do either to the one GOD, or the one LORD. So that, with the Spanish friar, we might have expected to find the Virgin Mary a first person

son in the Trinity, the *trifagion* would then have been, *holy, holy, holy, Lady Goddess almighty!* Or, if popery had ever been able to model the divine testimony to our Lord's mission, what wild and whimsical scenes must have enlivened the gospel history, we might guess by the *Golden Legend* compiled by the vicar general of the Dominicans, *J. de Voragine*, received by the church and maintained for two hundred years with applause, though no accounts can be more ridiculous and romantic. Nay, more than this, the doctrine of our blessed Lord must have undergone a total change, in order to support the high pretensions of *St. Peter's* successors.

What shews, beyond debate, the genuineness and integrity of the new testament writings, is, their intrinsic evidence; for they give us the most complete and adorable idea of God, his perfections, providence, sovereignty, and rule over all! they best explain the nature of that homage which is most acceptable to deity; they
give

give a most clear and comprehensive plan of duty in our social capacity and connexion; and, above all other writings in the world, they inculcate principles which best support the dignity of human nature, and advance our capacity for a future felicity. In a word, they are the only writings which set the spirit of man free from all the horrid vassalage of priestly tyranny; and that encourage us to assert and maintain an absolute independence on all human authority in matters of religion; we are thus confident that our canon cannot have come to us through any corrupt canal of conveyance.

N. B. There is but one interpolation, I have ever heard of, *viz.* 1 *John*, v. 7. And that was owing to the universal spread of the pestilential Athanasian heresy; but has been detected by the honest, unprejudiced learned.

P. S. Among other ecclesiastical historians, Dr. LARDNER has, in his *Credibility of the Gospel History*, fully and clearly

shewn, that the new testament writings were never confined to the hands of popery; at the same time he has proved their being genuine and uncorrupt for above a thousand years; and that they have been owned, throughout those ages, by an abundant testimony, as being of apostolic authority. This same very celebrated writer has also remarked, when speaking of the *Manicheans*, “ they said indeed, that the scriptures “ of the new testament had been interpolated in some time past, but they “ never corrupted or interpolated them, “ nor attempted it; nor could they, or “ any others, corrupt them, if they “ would; as *Augustine* observes.” See *Credibility*, b. 1. ch. lxiii. § 8. p. 421. He is now publishing a most valuable collection of the *Pagan Testimonies*.

I am yours,

CREDENS.

C E P I S T L E

E P I S T L E IV.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

The internal evidence of the divinity of the gospel discernible in its first address.

S I R,

THE new testament canon which we have in our hands, in our own language, will enable us to form a judgment of its divinity, from the circumstances in which the first publication of it must have been made: if therefore an unbeliever would but lay aside all prejudice, and advert with care to the *internal evidence*, he must see reason to acknowledge its divine original. Upon the face of the gospel history it appears, that its author, throughout the whole of his ministrations, did despise and reject all motives, maxims, and measures that were secular and worldly: he did not, in any one instance, exercise authority over the personal rights and claims of

of

of mankind; nor offer the least violence to the liberty and religious freedom of the human spirit; and notwithstanding the whole of his nation did expect and desire that their *Messiah* should be a temporal prince, and would often have proclaimed him their captain-general, he refused the honours they would have paid him; and by no means would he gratify the reigning passion of his country: in this respect he shewed his humility and freedom from pride and ambition, though he knew himself to be of the royal family, a descendant of *David*, and was hosanna'd too under that character, as the prince *Messiah*. But because his kingdom was not of this world, therefore he submitted to every kind of abuse and indignity, which could be offered him by a disappointed, provoked, and incensed people; nay, at last, he laid down his life at the haughty and insolent demand of his nation, in order to demonstrate the spiritual and heavenly nature of his kingdom.

After his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, he commissioned apostles, and other disciples, to publish his doctrine in *Judea*, not only in the face of national prejudice, but they are to preach up the doctrine of a crucified *Jesus* to other nations, which must also strongly excite the prejudices of the whole *Gentile* world.

Yet, in this arduous and perilous business of preaching up the doctrine of the cross, they are not enabled nor allowed to make use of the pathetic artificial address, of either the *Roman* or the *Greek* oratory ; but they are to deliver their doctrine with all possible plainness and simplicity, without the flourish of rhetorical ornament. No manner of assistance is given them from connections with the great or noble ; none from riches or worldly possessions ; none from a liberal education, that even a *Paul* might make use of in this service. And what are they to do ? why, verily, they are first to declare in their own nation, that the rulers and governors were capitally guilty
of

of the blood of their master; they are even to accuse them, to the face, of an unheard of impiety; *viz.* that of the *putting to death the Lord of Life!* besides which, they are to convict the body of the people of having consented to the murder of their prince and saviour; and under this conviction they are to urge their deepest remorse and penitence as the term of pardon.

Another part of their apostolic commission is, to abolish and root up the established ritual, though of divine original; and to prove, from their own scriptures, that the Mosaic covenant was but of a temporary nature, because local; and therefore to be superseded by a more universal and perfect institution: to this we may add their endeavours to demolish that system of superstition and idolatry, which had covered the whole Gentile world. In this apostolic Herculean labour, the opposition would be universally violent from inveterate prejudice and prepossession, both

of Jew and Gentile; because the popular religion had been every where adapted to the purpose of gratifying a sovereign influence of appetite and passion; and these very popular systems had likewise the formidable support and protection of civil power; and were, accordingly, countenanced and complimented both by the learned and the great.

From these strictures, it is manifest that the convert to christianity must renounce all worldly expectations, disdain and reject every temporary motive; and all this, only to embrace a doctrine divinely calculated to make men meek, modest, and humble, temperate and chaste; patient, benevolent, compassionate, and forgiving; devout and pious.

The apostles are indeed conscious of delivering a doctrinal instruction about the laws of God's kingdom, which was more conformable to right reason, and to the principles of natural religion, than could any where be found in the best teachings of the most celebrated philosophers; at the
very

very time that they see the profession will expose the professor to every kind of temporal inconvenience and evil; thus, apparently, the enmity of the world must run furiously against them.

Nor only so, but the *doctrine of the cross* would expose them to the ridicule and raillery of all the wits of *Greece and Rome*, as it bid defiance to their doubts, and threw infinite contempt on all their boasted wisdom and knowledge. Every thing may be said to have conspired to heighten the improbability of the success of the gospel, at its first publication. Not one single complying edict to be found in all the economic rules and precepts, which abound in the heavenly instruction; nothing to sooth the passions, nothing to countenance an occasional conformity to the customs and manners of the *world*; upon all political principles and maxims, the eye of truth, in that divine system, has an harsh, forbidding and self-denying aspect. Thus it appears, there was neither artifice, cunning, bribery,

bribery, nor force, nothing at all political, secular, or worldly to recommend the profession. In the expressive language of our Lord, *the son of man had not where to lay his head. And as well might a camel go through the eye of a needle, as a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Nevertheless, under all these discouragements, the gospel was first propagated in an age of distinguished learning and knowledge, when mankind were inquisitive and extremely curious: if therefore it had success, and did spread in the world, it must have been owing to its intrinsic excellence, and incontestible divine evidence; or, as an apostle would express it, *it was not by enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit, and of power:* there was no possibility of its deriving any influence or energy from human policy, cunning, or artificial contrivance; but it must have made its way by the simplicity of its own divine evidence. And, verily, such is the nature, spirit, genius, and design

sign of the gospel system, that the demonstration is perpetual and universal; for no other than the moral rectitude, consistence, harmony, and everlasting pleasure of the human mind, is the ground, scope, and aim of its instruction. Thus it must be owned that there is not one writing in all the world, that has equal claim to reverence with the New Testament scriptures, either for sublime and heavenly doctrine, for universal extent and spotless purity of moral precept; for perfection, lustre, and glory of example; and for weight and energy in the motive and argument to conform to the divine standard.

But to explore the whole compass and force of the intrinsic evidence of the divinity of the gospel-system, will require the whole life of man; and thanks be to God, even that is too short for our making experiment of its beneficial influence upon our own spirits: however, in the gradual advances we make, through the years of our mortality, we learn the meaning of that declaration, *if any man will do his*
C 5 *will,*

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will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

Indisputably plain and fully convincing is then the internal evidence, since all the teachings of the gospel are moral, spiritual, and heavenly; they are such as dispose man to become regular, just, faithful, and benevolent in all his social connexions; and they support too, and comfort him under every painful trying circumstance of his probation.—Upon the whole, the internal evidence yet discernible of the divinity of the gospel institution, in its first address, is what will ever discountenance and condemn infidelity.

So verily concludes,

Your devoted, &c.

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E V.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

The gospel system divinely attested by external evidence.

S I R,

WHEN we *believers* are urging in proof of the divinity of the gospel-system, that it had the attestation of both *prophecy* and *miracle*, the *unbeliever* smiles, and he is strongly inclined either to reproach or ridicule the testimony. But what are his strong reasons?—"He, " for his part, cannot conceive how any " such fore-knowledge of things should be " communicated to man; and he would " much rather conclude, that all pretensions to *prophecy* have been imaginary " and delusive; he will also insist upon " it, that if such testimony was ever need- " ful, it must be always so."—This I pre-

sume to be extremely weak and inconclusive; for we may be assured, from all history sacred and prophane, that *prophecy* has had a real existence; and not any thing is either more probable or more credible from the face of facts recorded in the best monuments of antiquity—*For example*, who can once suppose that God should deluge the old world without forewarning its inhabitants of that destruction, in order to reclaim and reform them? The known perfections of God will not admit of the supposition; accordingly we are informed, that *Enoch*, the seventh prophet from *Adam*, did foretel the judgment which would be executed upon that wicked generation of men, if they did not repent; and after him *Noah* did likewise forewarn them.

Sodom and the *Cities of the Plain* would not have been destroyed, had not their inhabitants despised the warnings given them by a righteous *Lot*.—Also the whole historical narrative of the ages of the *Hebrew* republic, is almost one continued record of prophecy,

prophecy, their several calamities and captivities being foretold by their prophets. And we are assured of the truth of prophecy from the later testimony of *Josephus*, at the finishing of their polity; for he tells us “ of a man, who for seven years together “ before the destruction of *Jerusalem* under “ *Titus*, every day cried, *a voice from the “ east! a voice from the west!*” This was a fact, about which it was impossible men could be deceived. *Josephus* was himself an eye and ear witness; he was at *Jerusalem* at the very time when this preacher so solemnly denounced its desolation, and was treated as a madman; and the historian assures us, he continued the cry till the siege, and then denounced a *woe* to the city, and a *woe* to himself, and so fell dead on the walls, by a stone cast from one of the engines of the enemy.

The gospel history does farther assure us, that our Jesus, the great prophet of God, did most expressly foretel that unheard of distress, and amazing destruction of his nation,

nation, city, and temple.—And may we not add, that were it not for the spirit of prophecy, mankind could never have had a general idea of the final conflagration? “ a doctrine of the highest antiquity ; a
 “ doctrine that was constantly maintained
 “ by the stoics, and before them taught by
 “ *Heraclitus, Empedocles*, and others ; and
 “ which probably came to the *Greeks* from
 “ the *Ægyptians* and *Phœnicians*. The
 “ poets have likewise preserved the antient
 “ tradition of the last destruction by fire ;
 “ as might be shewn from *Sophocles, Lu-*
 “ *cretius, Ovid, Lucan, &c.* And so the
 “ *Brachmans of India* have held from the
 “ most antient times.” But like other traditions this has been corrupted.—The christians have likewise another fact which is the object of their faith and hope ; and that is, the appearance of Christ at the end of his mediatorial reign, when he shall summon all the world before him, and deliver up the kingdom to God, even the father.

It

It is notorious that the testimony of prophecy was urged both by our Lord and by his apostles, with an appeal to that testimony, in order to persuade the *Jewish* nation that our *Jesus* was the very *Messiah*, whom they were to look for; and that he did actually make his appearance at the precise time that prophecy had marked out, and when the expectation was spread all over the east.

Besides the above incontestible proofs of prophetic testimony, it will be difficult for us to form any sort of idea of what is meant by the *truth* and *faithfulness* of God, if he had never made any one express promise to man; in other words, if there has never been the divine testimony of prophecy, and who is it that can look out of countenance the flagrant evidence which arises from the *Jewish* dispersion? Men may indeed, with great labour and an acquired obstinacy, shut their eyes against the light at noon day, and confidently say, it is then midnight; but it will prove nothing more than their own madness and folly.

We shall next say something of *miracle*, that other external notable branch of divine testimony. By miracle we would be understood to mean, “ those manifestations
 “ of divine power, which are above the ut-
 “ most natural ability of those agents, by
 “ whose instrumentality such manifesta-
 “ tions are made.” Had no such thing ever existed as *miracle*, we can boldly affirm, that the Jewish and Christian sacred scriptures could never have gained any, the least, degree of credit or reputation with mankind. But it was utterly impossible that the *exodus* of *Israel* from *Egypt*, under the conduct of *Moses*, who is said to have wrought a series of miracles, could have been obtruded upon that people as a fact, unless it had been so ; there is no conceivable way of supposing such a tradition, had it been a chimera or imposture : a passage opened for that people through the Red Sea ; the *Egyptian* king and his army drowned in their pursuit, could not be a fable ; the object is too large ;

large; and it is also too open for invention.—Neither could the giving the law at *Sinai*, with such solemnity, be the result of any human contrivance, or of magical production; the divine interposition was demonstrated to the sight and hearing of all the *Hebrew* people. And the very preface to the decalogue is a solemn record of the fact, and a monument of the miraculous deliverance they had from *Egyptian* bondage. And I farther ask, whether forty years journeyings in the wilderness, wherein such prodigious numbers could only be fed by the immediate hand of heaven, whether this record does not scorn the suspicion of imposture?

Again, what human mind can, with the least shadow of reason, suppose, that the gospel records could ever, in any age, have obtained credit, as a divine system of truth, if miracle had no existence? Not any thing could have been more forbidding, nor more imprudent and silly, than to have spread over the whole history of our Lord's
life

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life a vast variety of miracle, performed only in *Judea*, where the miracle-worker and his disciples had the greatest enmity shewn towards them, and where they found the most virulent and outrageous abuse and ill usage. Nay, verily, one may venture to conclude, there would have been no room for an opposition of hatred, malice, and enraged cruelty, if no miracle had been wrought; forasmuch as this rage borrowed all its spirit from the disability which the *Jews* were under of invalidating the evidence, the divine testimony they found was too powerful for them; and therefore they, in their confusion, wickedly ascribe it to demonism, to sorcery, and to magical impressions! In this circumstance, when the popular disappointment also ran high, and the spiritual mission of Christ disagreed so much with the general expectation; it is not at all supposable, that either our Lord, or his apostles, could support the credit to a divine mission, had it not been for the aid of miracle.

We

We are to observe farther, *sir*, that this divine testimony never was, nor ever could be given, in any trifling or silly concerns of mankind, neither in any worldly and perishing affairs ; and much less to countenance any falsehood, villainy, or wickedness : in no case could miracle be wrought, that was unworthy of, or beneath the majesty of a divine testimony. Impossible also it must have been for any man ever to have wrought a miracle, by power derived from evil spirits or demons ; because this would be to suppose an ability of forging openly the great seal of heaven, and of rendering precarious and doubtful the most conclusive of all external divine testimony ; this is not in the least consistent with the paternal character of that universal sovereign, *who would have all men come to the knowledge of the truth.* And we are informed, that an early detection of imposture was in fact manifest in the case of *Egyptian* force-rers, whose magical arts could not stand before the face of real miracle ; we therefore

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fore conclude, that this divine testimony was never once given, in any age, but to a divine mission or message. With this idea of miracle, I confidently subscribe myself,

Yours,

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E V.

From CREDENS to SCEPTICUS.

A divine revelation inferrable from the original condition of man, and also from his general depravity.

S I R,

WHENEVER I mention the term *deism*, I would be understood to mean a disbelief of revelation; as by *revelation* I would intend, “ a discovery which
 “ God made of himself, not by an immediate inspiration of every man, but by an
 “ information given to particular persons,
 “ whom he commissioned to communicate such *truths* to others; which he has,
 “ in this extraordinary manner, made
 “ known to such individuals; and to
 “ whom he gives sufficient credentials of
 “ their having had a divine illumination.”
 It is unreasonable to imagine, that the first inhabitants

inhabitants of either the *old* or the *new* world could be without a divine revelation; for pray, what would the original parent of mankind have done, introduced into being, and furrounded with a numerous varied species of animals, which compose the brutal creation? Can we suppose him, without experience, uninformed by any observation, and yet capable of knowing the natures, uses, intentions, and subordinations of the animal system, unless the Creator had given him an immediate information? *Moses*, accordingly, in his most antient and best authenticated history, records that revelation which was made to him; forasmuch as he reports *Adam*, as giving names to all the cattle, and to the fowls of the air, and to every beast of the field. But we have no reason to imagine that this ability of investigating the animal creation could be owing to any thing less than an immediate divine inspiration. And yet such a compass of knowledge appears to have been needful to the first of the human

man

man race, who is to exercise dominion over them; and who is also to educate and instruct his children in natural philosophy, and in the more wide contemplations of the created system.

In like manner we might argue, with respect to the first occupants of the *new* world, who survived the universal deluge; concerning which event, the evidence has been such as does thoroughly convince the best philosophers; neither are there wanting to this day fresh proofs of the deluge. These *new planters*, we may conclude, must stand in need of such significations of the divine will, as should give courage and spirit both to them and to their posterity, by taking away all suspicion and dread of another watery destruction overtaking them. Such assurance is accordingly said to have been given them; and they are likewise furnished with a new edition of creation laws, perfectly suited to the condition of the new colony, and of continuing to be the
established

established universal rules to all succeeding generations.]

Should it here be said, by my friend SCEPTICUS, *that this is to prove a revelation, by taking for granted a revelation*; the answer would be this, were there no written record at all, that we now deem sacred, since we cannot do otherwise than suppose a parent, or a first of the human race, whether one or more, made to people the earth, the ideas of that original or primitive condition of man, as given by *Moses*, is, of all others, the most natural and probable; and from the easy and ready assent it meets withal in the human mind, it has all the signatures and marks of truth upon it. The very same thing may be affirmed with relation to *Noah* and his family, the first occupants of the new world.—Thus it is that I presume a revelation inferrable from the original condition of man.

We may next take a careful and accurate survey of the manners and characters of
of

of after-ages of mankind; and in doing so, we shall be constrained to own, that the idolatries and vices of the world have been a manifest departure from the original institutions of truth, of order, and of the more universal simplicity, innocence, and purity of the first ages. Neither is there any thing more evident, than that the worship of the one true God must be presupposed to the worship of any false God. Men would never have become so vain in their imaginations, as to have invented an idolatrous worship, if there had not been a previous acknowledgment made of the homage due to the one living and true God. Neither would *polytheism* ever had place, if the *unity* had not been the original religious conception of man: in other words, had not a demonstration been given of an eternal power and godhead, men would never have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and into birds and four-footed beasts, and into creeping
D things!

things! they would not thus have changed the truth of God into a lie, had there been no evidence of the being and perfection of the one living and true God.

But as idolatry and polytheism are what do presuppose a true worship paid to the one God, so all other kinds of *impostures* are in proof of some genuine archetype, or divine original. One might instance in *oracles* and pretensions to *prophecy*, wherein mankind could never have been so far abandoned to all the impressions of nature, as to reverence the fictitious and false, had there never been a truly divine oracle, or a genuine prophet. Semblance of truth, an apish similitude of nature, has ever given all the advantage that could attend the spirit of imposture; there is no other way of accounting for the infatuation of the heathen world. And pray, Sir, let me ask, what other account can any man give of the spread of popery and mahometanism, but that of their being an artful political perversion of an original divine system? for had there not been the most incontestible
proofs

proofs of the divinity of the gospel institution, neither the one nor the other imposture could have spread with such an amazing rapidity and wonderful success. The one indeed has not made much pretence to miracle, but only to inspiration; the other has affected a claim to both; each of them has borrowed much from paganism. And yet, even the *oracles* of antient Greece did not presume to know things above the reach of human wisdom. But with much more confidence the popish priest assumes an authority to dispose of the final fates of men, not being content with any homage below that of an implicit faith in his power, either to *damn*, or to *save*!

Whereas, I apprehend, the pagan oracle was chiefly consulted about secular or worldly matters; and made use of by magistrates, statesmen, or generals of armies, in order to give a sanction to their political schemes, or to give courage and spirit to their soldiery. But the pride and insolence of the popish priest reaches to the enormous height of

D 2 robbing

robbing the people of the written divine oracle, which they will not suffer them to consult; but do oblige them to swallow down whatever sense they are pleased to give of the sacred canon. These things are in demonstration of an original truth, which men have so visibly perverted and abused, only to serve the purposes of their pride, avarice, and luxury. In fact, such have been the customary maxims and manners of the men of the world, in all ages and nations, to corrupt the first principles of reason and nature, under the specious pretexts of religion. And verily, of all characters found in those writings, which we call sacred, there are none more hateful than that drawn of the sacerdotal hypocrite; the man who wears the mask of piety or sanctity, to the vile purpose of exercising a tyranny over the consciences of men.—Not any thing could more illustrate the fatal influence of such hypocrisy than that of the *Jewish*-priesthood, who persuaded the people that their *Messiah* must be a temporal

poral prince and saviour; which so far sealed up their senses, and laid them under an infatuation, that a train of the most astonishing beneficent miracles could not make any impression upon them; and they were at last prevailed upon even to crucify their saviour, and thereby bring a dreadful destruction on their whole nation.

Popery, in like manner, will have it, that the mission of Jesus is of a secular nature, and that his kingdom is worldly. Here I would again ask, whether this barefaced *imposture* would not lead the rational inquirer to conclude, that there must have been a genuinely divine system, of which popery is so manifest a perversion?

Two conclusions may be fairly drawn; one is, that an affectation of giving law to conscience in matters of religion, has been the fertile source of the universal depravity and deformity of mankind; and another is, that *imposture* could never have had place

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in the world, had there not been an original revelation divinely attested by prophecy and miracle.

These, Sir, are the sentiments of

Yours,

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E VII.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

Publick monuments erected as memorials of those facts which are recorded in sacred scriptures.

S I R,

IT is well observed, by the author of *the short and easy way with the deists*, that there are *four* rules, which ascertain the truth of any matter of fact, however wonderful: “ 1. That the matter of fact be
 “ such, as that mens outward senses, their
 “ eyes and ears, may be judges of it. 2.
 “ That it be done publickly, in the face
 “ of the world. 3. That not only publick
 “ monuments be kept up in memory of it,
 “ but some outward actions be performed.
 “ 4. That such monuments and such actions
 “ or observances be instituted, and do
 “ commence from the time that the mat-
 “ ter of fact was done.”

The two first rules make it impossible for any matter of fact to be imposed upon men, at the same time when such matter of fact was said to be done ; because every man's eyes and senses would contradict it. —But should it be said, that the credulity of after-ages might be imposed upon, the two last rules will secure the certainty ; forasmuch as the monuments and observances, instituted as memorials, are what give an incontestible evidence. Thus the twelve stones, or pillars, set up at *Gilgal*, were in memory of the miraculous passage of the *Israelites* through the *Red Sea*, and over *Jordan*. —The institution of the *weekly Sabbath* was in commemoration of their deliverance out of *Egypt* ; as was the *passover* a yearly commemoration of the destroying angel sparing the first-born of the *Israelites*, at the time he cut off all those of the *Egyptians* ; which event prevailed so much upon that oppressive nation, as to let the *Hebrews* have the liberty of going away, under the conduct of *Moses*. Their several

veral *feasts* were also recognitions of wonderful facts that were highly interesting to the *Hebrew* nation.

Under the christian institution, those facts which are so very distinguishing, and what give a peculiar complexion to the gospel system, are thus infallibly ascertained, as to the truth and importance of them, by distinct monumental recognitions; *e. g.* the *crucifixion* of Christ, is a fact of which we are as well assured, as if we had been eye and ear witnesses of the horrid impiety; and this, by the observance of an eucharistical rite, which was instituted the evening before the crucifixion; which observance, at the time that it demonstrates the truth, conveys an idea of the importance of that event, as it stood connected with its consequences. It is an *eucharistical* rite, because of the beneficial doctrinal instruction which it contains, and because of the divine rewards which were conferred on the man Christ Jesus, on account of that act of exemplary obedience.

The change of the *seventh-day sabbath* to that of the first day of the week, is another monument of a fact, which peculiarly distinguishes the gospel-system; and that fact is, the personal *resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead.—No other reason is assignable for the change of the sabbath. And it is not at all reasonable to suppose that an event (on which did depend the convincing demonstration of Jesus being the son of God, and the Saviour of the world) should not be recognized by some monumental observance; since it would require a perpetual illustration. Nor was it reasonable that the *Jewish* sabbath should remain the weekly festival to the *Jewish* convert; since such resurrection did introduce his *Lord's* investiture into a kingdom which was not national, but universal. And because his Lord had also taught a spiritual worship, which did abolish all carnal ordinances, and vacate the whole of the *Mosaic* ritual. The reason of the thing would justify the change.

And,

And, no doubt, the appearances of Jesus Christ to his disciples, met together on the day of the resurrection, and on future first days of the week, as well as the pouring down of spiritual gifts at *pentecost*, on that christian festival, would authorize the religious observance. It is quite natural to suppose, that a weekly observance of the resurrection day, would be held sacred by apostles and first christians, who were publishing that doctrine to the world.

Another monumental recognition of a fact, which is very distinguishing and peculiar to the gospel system, is that of *baptism*; a memorial symbol, an open acknowledgment of the crucified and risen Jesus's being *exalted to the right hand of power*; even to the exercise of a lordship and dominion over the dead, and over the living! This appears to be the precise scripture doctrine of baptism, as it was instituted by our Lord; *all power, says he, is given me in heaven and earth; go, disciple all nations, baptizing them.* Hence we read

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of converts to the gospel doctrine being baptized, and all their households with them, in acknowledgment that Jesus is constituted of God both *Lord* and *Christ*, *Prince* and *Saviour*. By the application of baptism, we then do recognize his universal sovereignty, and own him to be head over all things to the church of God.

Thus the baptized are initiated into the church and kingdom of the one God, and put under the protection, care, and guidance of the one Lord, whom God has appointed to raise the dead and judge the world; which action is not repeated, because it does only express the rite of initiation into the christian church, or a dedication to his patronage, who is the *light* and the *life* of men. We thus discern the manifest reason and use of the several branches of the christian ritual, and have our faith confirmed and established in the truth of those facts which they recognize, and we have also a superior satisfaction in contemplating the monumental evidence.

If

If a reliance can be had on the truth of any facts, recorded to have been done in very distant past ages, these memorial monuments may be absolutely depended upon, as what cannot possibly deceive us. No antient *coins, medals, pillars*, or other works of human hands, designed to perpetuate the memory of celebrated men, or of some great events, have so many expressive marks of an infallible testimony. And yet, the critical and judicious ANTIQUARIAN would utterly despise the man's ignorance, or his prejudice, who should controvert the genuineness of the best authenticated original pieces of any one of the *Cæsars*.

In the case before us, the spiritual doctrine of the fact, and the moral intention of the ritual, together with its simplicity, give us such exalted ideas of the character which these monuments do commemorate, as can only belong to a divine messenger, whom the great God has designed to distinguish with supreme honours; he having illustriously

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lustriously been *the true and faithful witnesses* to his benevolent plan of providence, rule, and government. There are no marks or tokens of human policy, cunning, or contrivance to gratify one single irregular passion, either of sensuality, avarice, or ambition; neither are the observances such as do discover the superstitious airs of enthusiasm; but they are apt, expressive, and suitable to the divine purposes of their institution. And, in a word, such is the nature of these monumental recognitions, that there never was a time during the ages of christianity, when they could have had their original institution independent on the known reality of those facts which they commemorate; *e. g.* no possible motive could operate upon the mind, either of a *Jew* or of an *heathen*, to contrive the eating of bread and drinking of wine religiously, in commemoration of the death of a man publicly condemned and crucified, as a malefactor, if he had not been both assured of the fact, and that the person so suffering was worthy of the greatest esteem

and veneration, as a favourite of heaven ! Nor only so, but there must have been an assurance also that such eating and drinking was of divine appointment; and should be performed with all the chearfulness and joy of mind, that can arise from a full conviction of his innocence, exalted piety, and virtue.

We might, in like manner, calculate the weight of evidence from the change of the weekly festival, and the institution of baptism.—And thus, *Sir*, I have stated the testimony to the truth of those facts which are peculiar to the christian profession; and have shewn you, that, in my humble opinion, the public monuments do afford no less than an incontestible evidence.

Allow me to add, those persons seem to be under very mistaken impressions, who can imagine any diminution, or a decrease of the strength and power of gospel evidence.

Yours,

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E VIII.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

Such discoveries of divine truth have been actually made, as could not be owing to the unassisted efforts of human reason.

S I R,

LEST you should be of opinion, that the argument has borrowed too much from the revelation itself, I would take notice of that objection which has been formed, “ from the adequate powers of “ human reason, for the discovery of all “ needful truth;” for from hence the *unbeliever* has thought himself deeply intrenched, because of that specious plea, “ of the impartial and universal goodness “ of GOD, who has not, any where, left “ himself without witness; but has written “ his law upon the tablet of every human “ heart;” and verily the manifestations of his power and godhead are as expressively
shewn,

shewn, by the system of nature and providence, to the inhabitants of *China*, *India*, *the Cape of Good Hope*, and *Mexico*, as to the people of *New* or of *Old England*, or to any other of the polite nations. Neither may we be allowed to suppose, that the natural powers and abilities of the savage *American*, trained up in brigandage and bloody expeditions, as of inferior strength and less penetration, than the natural endowments of the more civilized; but we are, nevertheless, obliged to own, that the reason and understanding of an *Hottentot*, or of an *American* savage, has a veil of ignorance thrown upon it, when compared with the more enlightened and cultivated mind. And though we may not deny him an improveable or an accountable talent, so far as he is rational and moral, yet we are obliged to put more articles of obligation upon that mind, which has been under more liberal instruction.

It is, moreover, extremely evident from the history of the world, that very great alterations

alterations have been made in the state and condition of large kingdoms and empires, which once have shone with distinguished lustre and reputation for knowledge in science; but anon have sunk into the depths of ignorance and barbarity. Scarce a part of this habitable globe but what has had its revolutions: some, in one age, immersing deeply into ignorance, superstition, and vice, whilst others have bravely emerged from a barbarous system of customs and manners, and from the most horrid slavery, into all the advantages of politeness, humanity, and liberty. From all history whatever, it should seem, that there have been some original divine revelations, which gave direction and law to the earliest ages of the world; and that the polytheism, idolatry, and immorality of mankind, have every where been owing to a corruption of those original divine teachings.

I have before mentioned the *Mosaic* history, as what gives us an assurance of that
original

original revelation. Perhaps, Sir, you will say, the authority of *Moses*, or those writings which go by his name, are questionable. Should this have any place in your mind, I would take notice, “ that *Artabanus* had an high opinion of *Moses*, counting him worthy of divine honour, and attributing to him the invention of philosophy; and that *Eupolemus* calls him, the first wise man; and that *Strabo* says, he had nobler notions of the divinity than either *Egyptians*, *Libyans*, or *Greeks*; and even *Varro* thought that the *Jews* were right, in worshipping one God without any image.” And it must be owned, that the most learned and best *chronologers* have corrected the errors of *Pagan* histories by the *Mosaic*.

Advert again to the account which *Moses* gives of the first man, you will find it rational and credible; he is no sooner made, than he is informed who is his maker, and what is his concern with, and dependance upon him; that his perfections he must supremely

premely reverence, and his laws religiously obey. Nor is it at all reasonable to suppose it might be otherwise; since the first formed of mankind could have no possible information, in these things, but from some intelligible declaration made by the *oracle*.

There are several other strictures of such divine revelation, very apparent in the history; *e. g.* the oracular voice to *Cain*; and we cannot but suppose as much in the prophetic character of *Enoch*, previous to his translation; and in the instructions given to *Noah*, the divine communications are manifest. In like manner, the same historian has observed of *Abraham*, in the post-diluvian world, that he had an intimate converse with the divine oracle, which would enable him, by his posterity, to convey a knowledge of the true God wide and far among the nations; for we can reasonably conclude, that the *Hebrew* people, by their various captivities and dispersions, would so diffusively spread the sense of the oracle, as to become, in a great degree, *the light of the Gentile world*.

And

And verily, the best prophane historians do inform us, that the divine knowledge, which *poets, philosophers, and lawgivers* had, was borrowed from antient tradition, and by that access which they had to a people who were in actual possession of the divine oracles. It will therefore be an extravagance in any one to say, that human reason was ever intended to be left *unassisted*, or that God did make man without design of affording him the benefit of some express revelation. And that this hath been the truth of the case, the general sense of mankind, in all ages and nations, gives an harmonious testimony.

This might be farther argued from the very best ideas we are able to form of God, the perfection of his wisdom, power, and presence; his being the *summum bonum* of the human mind, the constant, omnipresent refuge of man; and his final end; which do necessarily suppose, that infinite advantages must accrue from such divine information. And hence we may be farther assured of its being probable, that the

Deity

Deity has thus signified his will to mankind, as their universal law ; so that the doubt or denial of it must appear absurd and unreasonable.

It is not in the power of any man to shew, which way *reason*, unassisted by divine revelation, could have been able to form a consistent plan of worship ; and explore the nature, spirit, and extent of moral obligation, with that precision and accuracy which has been done, if there never had been a light afforded from the traditionary conveyance of some original revelation. Nay, even those extraordinary discoveries made by a *Confucius*, a *Socrates*, a *Plato*, an *Aristotle*, a *Seneca*, an *Epictetus*, or an *Antoninus*, must have borrowed much from antient tradition ; and we may not, by any means, be allowed to suppose the ordinary abilities of human reason equal to such attainments.

It is moreover unreasonable to imagine or conclude, “ that because all *moral* truth
 “ does approve itself to the human mind,
 “ as being in a perfect agreement with the
 “ best

“ best conceptions and ideas we can form
“ of things;” that therefore all moral truth
must be discoverable by men, without the
aid of revelation. The contrary might be
shewn in several instances; as in the case of
*a single communion of bodies between the
sexes*; a branch of moral truth that would
not have been so clearly made known to
be the creation-law, but by the express
voice of the Creator. Hence the christian
lawgiver has observed, that *monogamy*
was the universal law from the beginning.
Another branch of moral truth must have
been owing to the same divine *source*; for
how would unassisted reason have deter-
mined that the sacred parental authorita-
tive claims should cease, and give way to
the conjugal obligations, had not the
oracle said, *for this cause shall a man leave
father and mother, and cleave to his wife?*
i. e. he shall give an affectionate care of
her the preference.—And again, how
would it have been known, that *one day in
seven* should be devoted to a sacred rest
from

from the labour, both of men and cattle, if there had been no original expressly divine institution of a weekly sabbath? To these instances might we not add, the prohibition of all *image worship* of the true God, as what corrupts the imagination, and destroys that purity and spirituality of religious homage, which must have been of divine original; because we have an almost universal demonstration of the proneness of mankind to this species of idolatry. For my own part, when I consider this amazing disposition in mankind to images, or fanciful sensible representations of the Gods they worship, I cannot conceive of a more conclusive evidence of the divine original of the *ten words*, said to have been delivered to *Moses* at Mount *Sinai*, and written upon two tables of stone, by the finger, *i. e.* the immediate power of GOD.

As to the unity of GOD, some have idly fancied, “ that *elves* and *fairies* were the “ first Gods of the human race.” Though from the best accounts we have of the most
antient

antient times, the worship of the one God, as creator of the heavens and earth, was the first religion of mankind; and the first idolatry appears to have been the worship of heavenly bodies, as prompted thereunto, from the lustre, splendor, and beneficial influence of the sun, moon, and stars upon this globe. However, the *unity of God* must have been a moral truth, first discovered to man by an express revelation. God did not then, by making man intelligent and rational, design to render him incapable of intercourses with himself, and thereby put him into a state of independence; but he gave him more understanding than the beasts which perish, to the end he might receive from him, the father of lights, wisdom and divine instruction. Such ideas possess the mind of, *Sir,*

Your humble servant,

CREDENS.

E

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E IX.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

Morals of philosophers and legislators no refuge for infidelity.

S I R,

AS we are discussing the argument in favour of revelation, and exposing the pleas of infidelity, I would proceed to observe, that the benefit accruing to mankind from those scriptures which we call sacred, might be illustrated from *want of authority* in the most celebrated moral instructions of philosophers and legislators: for, upon a supposition that the *Gentile* world had ever produced a system void of defects and blemishes, the authority of such a system must have been acknowledged so far divine, as to supersede the necessity of any farther information. But when it is found, upon the most accurate and impartial examination, that great deformities

are

are notorious in the very best systems of pagan antiquity, even where the efforts of genius and the powers of human reason have done their utmost; it will follow, that *authority* fails, and an universal canon or rule cannot thence be deducible. More than this, we can affirm, without danger, that the best of these human systems do die away, and all their lustre vanishes, upon the approach of a pure, perfect, divine light, flowing from what we denominate, the gospel revelation.

We find then, that, in fact, they had no determinate rule of duty; nor were they acquainted with the extensive lines of morality; “ either in the precepts of their religion, in the instruction of its ministers, “ in the prescriptions of the civil laws and “ institutions of their magistrates, in those “ customs, which had the force of laws; “ no, nor in the doctrines and maxims of “ their philosophers and moralists. Even “ their *priests* did not make it their business to teach men virtue; their office “ verily was, to instruct the people what

“ Gods they were to worship, what sacri-
 “ fices they were to offer to their several
 “ deities, and in what manner they were
 “ to observe the appointed rites.

“ Their civil institutions were also as de-
 “ fective, and their most eminent philoso-
 “ phers seem to resolve the whole duty of
 “ a good man *into an obedience to the laws*
 “ *of his country*; and yet, great indecencies
 “ and iniquities obtained in many of their
 “ established rites and religious ceremonies :
 “ *e.g.* among the antient *Egyptians*, they had
 “ incest, theft, want of faith, and the prof-
 “ titution of women, which last was ac-
 “ counted honourable. The *Greeks* had also
 “ many laws and customs contrary to hu-
 “ manity; such as the whipping of boys to
 “ death, upon the altar of *Diana Orythia*.
 “ Not any thing could exceed their cruelty
 “ to slaves; and one of the laws of *Lycurgus*
 “ did oblige the father to bring his young
 “ child to be examined by a committee of
 “ men, and if of a bad constitution, &c. it
 “ must be cast into a deep cavern, near the
 “ mountain *Taygetus*. Nor was the ex-
 “ posing

“ posing of children peculiar to *Lacede-*
“ *mon*; it was common to other parts of
“ *Greece*, and also to all other nations.
“ The *Spartan* boys were also trained to
“ dextrous thieving, by another of *Lycur-*
“ *gus*’s laws; and he ordered young maid-
“ ens should appear naked in the public
“ exercises, and thus dance with the young
“ men at their solemn festivals. Nay,
“ married women might be lent by their
“ husbands to other men, in order to their
“ having healthy and strong children, for
“ the benefit of the commonwealth. Al-
“ impure love of boys was also common
“ and in some of their cities encourage
“ by their laws. *Plutarch* observes, tha-
“ even *Solon*, that great lawgiver, was no
“ proof against beautiful boys.

“ The *Romans* also had barbarous laws
“ with regard to *slaves* and *gladiators*;
“ their very women took pleasure in see-
“ ing men kill one another! And *Cicero*
“ mentions the most shocking unnatural
“ vice, without any one mark of disap-
“ probation. And in the article of sui-

“ cide, both *Greeks* and *Romans* agree in
 “ defending the insolent impiety. It was
 “ an avowed doctrine of the *stoics*, that it
 “ was not only lawful, but the duty of a
 “ wise man, in certain given circumstances,
 “ to dispatch himself; this they called, an
 “ exit agreeable to reason.—*Epictetus* and
 “ *Antoninus*, who carried their system of
 “ morals higher than any of the other *sto-*
 “ *ics*, admit this doctrine; expressing them-
 “ selves thus—*Is the house in a smoke? if*
 “ *it be a moderate one, I will stay; if not,*
 “ *I will go out, the door is open;* so *Epicle-*
 “ *tus*. And *Antoninus* did agree with him.
 “ *Zeno*, *Cleanthes*, and *Cato*, did actually
 “ destroy themselves; and *Cicero* vindi-
 “ cates *Cato*. Also thus, we are inform-
 “ ed, the disciples of *Fo* do behave in
 “ *China*.”

Now as to the stoical doctrine of *suicide*,
 every one at once sees, that it was in *them*
 extremely absurd; since they made pre-
 tensions of raising the human mind above,
 and to an utter insensibility of pain and
 evil. And very strange it surely was, that
 the

the *Roman laws* should give so much allowance to suicide; since the civil laws ordered, *that the suicide should not be lamented by his relations, and his will should not be valid.* Yet, if he killed himself through weariness of life, or from impatience under sickness, or from a principle of vain-glory, such were to be excused the penalty; so says *Ulpian*. And the lawyer *Paulus* adds, as a farther reason of suicide, *the shame of being in debt.*

From these immoralities in the pagan system of philosophy and law, can any thing be more reasonable than that we conclude, they had no canon which could claim the reverence of mankind; for however they might upon occasion teach,
“ that men were born to be helpful to
“ each other, in all the offices of mutual
“ assistance and benevolence, and that they
“ are united in the strongest ties and
“ bonds, as all belonging to one common
“ city of Gods and men; yet it is apparent, that some parts of their scheme

“ were little consistent with the humanity
“ and natural benevolence, which it was the
“ design of many of them to recommend.”

This inconsistency is very apparent in the *stoics*, who are well known to have affected the vanity of having arisen to an astonishing virtue! and thereupon to have prescribed to their disciples a most unnatural apathy. Their *wise man* must truly be devoid of all passions! and yet, now and then, they throw in an hint to correct the extravagant maxim, and to reduce it to the bounds of nature and humanity. But after all they have done, there is very little in the stoical scheme of philosophy, which does either cherish or even countenance a just and generous sympathy with the distressed. And, in truth and fact, it is a most absurd scheme; since, instead of shewing men how to regulate and refine their passions, it would most stupidly and unnaturally teach the eradication of them.

Nay, we are able to add, that they have affected to cancel the idea of a *future punishment*, as the consequence of vice; which
manifestly

manifestly maims their system, and leaves it no energy nor air of authority.

In the article of *suicism*, before-mentioned, they affect an independence, and assert a sovereignty over life. That arrogant claim of a right to remove themselves, at pleasure, from this mode of existence, upon any humoursome disgust, has altogether excluded the idea of *divine authority* from their system. We cannot, then, but hold their system in the utmost contempt; and with painful concern do explore such matchless pride and vanity, giving complexion to the human mind; for *life* cannot be the property of any one, but its author. Nor can human life be at the disposal of any but the universal sovereign, unless by contracted guilt forfeited to the public; or else by public virtue exposed for the safety and weal of mankind.

Some moderns are as fond, as the antient stoics ever were, of affecting a scheme of independence; and would fain exclude the idea of *divine authority* from their system of morals. Whereas it is the perfection

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“ and natural benevolence, which it was the
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Some moderns are as fond, as the antient stoics ever were, of affecting a scheme of independence; and would fain exclude the idea of *divine authority* from their system of morals. Whereas it is the perfection

of gospel instruction, that it lays the foundation of all virtue, in a first regard to the approbation of God, both in all we do, and in all we are. This very principle gives the lustre and dignity of his character, whom christians venerate as the author and finisher of their faith ! and all his teachings direct the human mind to this scope of aim and pursuit. And is there any maxim of equal importance to the religious attention of man ? Remarkable it is, that in a constant steady view to the approbation of God, in all our actions and fruitions, we are set free from the enslaving influence of all human authority ; and we thereby find ourselves in the most natural, easy, and pleasing possession of ourselves ; whilst no other principle is able to give the soul of man this self-complacency. The truth of which is known to every one that ever made the experiment. Assured we may be, that this principle alone gave the blessed Jesus all his superiority to the ill-will and insult of the world ; and enabled him to shew such greatness of mind under
his

his tortures!—*not my will, but thine be done.*

Indeed, no system of rules or laws can uniformly and universally operate on the human mind, divested of *divine authority*. And were it possible to exclude that idea from the most consistent moral system, it would become unsatisfactory, unmeaning, and spiritless. But to conclude, there is an omnipotently wise and good being, whose *will* is expressed in that system; and we feel ourselves capable of a sure and an eternal refuge, in the cordial and constant conformity! It is therefore the result of ignorance and folly, or of pride and vanity, if any one should presume to give the pagan systems a preference to the gospel morality; or if they should exclude the *divine authority* from their own adopted moral system. Verily so thinks

Your most obedient,

CREDENS.

E P I S T L E X.

FROM CREDENS TO SCEPTICUS.

*The difference of opinion among learned men,
about the sense of revelation, no reason of
infidelity.*

S I R,

IN my former letter, you remember, I shewed, that infidelity can have no refuge in the systems of pagan philosophers and lawgivers: I am now to consider the objection, which you was pleased to say appeared to you as of most difficult solution; viz. “ that learned men, equally capable of
“ consulting what is called the divine canon,
“ and equally in earnest to defend the divine
“ authority of that canon, should, nevertheless, differ so widely, as they are found
“ to do, about its doctrinal instructions.”—
And hence, others have said, “ that christians are endlessly divided about every
“ precept, mode, and institution derived
“ from

“ from revelation.”—The answer to this has been often given, but of late with very good address, in the following manner.—
“ Admit that christians are so divided ; it
“ is not because the *new testament* writings
“ have greater obscurity than other books :
“ but the difference of opinion is owing to
“ the comments of men of different abilities,
“ interests, parties, prejudices, and
“ passions, who read them ; they bring
“ their prepossessions, from an early education,
“ along with them ; and, instead
“ of searching the scriptures impartially
“ to find their genuine sense, they seek
“ after something to justify their prejudices,
“ and gratify their passions. *Besides*, moral books
“ are written in a different manner to philosophical ones ;
“ and words are not to have that strict
“ interpretation in the one as in the other ;
“ figurative expressions are always capable
“ of a certain degree of latitude, which
“ may be extended beyond their original
“ design.” But after all, as the great
end

end of revelation is *moral*, there can be no difference about this among real christians; [for all such will and do own, that it requires and rewards a benevolent temper, and a regular life. And even the *motives* themselves are universally owned to be “ the
 “ favour of God, a resurrection from the
 “ dead, and a future recompence.” The matter of difference has then, in fact, rather been concerning what revelation *has not*, than what it *has* said.

“ But as the objection above made to re-
 “ velation would equally operate against *na-*
 “ *tural religion*, it can have no force; since
 “ there is no one principle of morality, but
 “ what has been the subject of debate and
 “ difference. The very existence of God;
 “ the nature of good and evil; the liberty of
 “ man as an accountable agent: in a word,
 “ there is not an article of natural religion,
 “ that has been free from controversy. I ask
 “ then, is there no such thing as morality,
 “ or natural religion? Is there no such
 “ thing as *truth*, because it has been ques-
 “ tioned.

“ tioned what it meaneth? Is there no
“ such thing as *right reason*, because men
“ have been found maintaining infinite ab-
“ surdities? Have not *mathematicians* dis-
“ puted about the first principles of geo-
“ metry? *Whether matter exists or not*,
“ has been the question; and whether the
“ principles of *fluxions* are not incompre-
“ hensible. If then mathematicians have
“ their mysteries, repugnancies, and mani-
“ fest contradictions, why should any ob-
“ ject to the sacred scriptures, as if they
“ were insufficient to convey to men
“ of common sense rules and motives to
“ virtue and happiness, only because many
“ have affected to contend about their
“ containing absurd doctrines, or repug-
“ nant maxims and injunctions; when
“ this very contention has only exposed
“ the ignorance, pride, or prejudice of the
“ men who have been concerned in the
“ contention? *Mystics* have first fathered
“ the absurdity upon the scriptures, and
“ then the weak or superficial objector to
“ revelation

“ revelation has too hastily concluded, that
“ it lay in the sacred canon.”

We may illustrate the above reasoning by farther observations. And what can be more fully in point, than the wide difference in the opinions of very learned men of our own country, all of them Protestants, in their commentaries on the antient *Gentile* philosophy, though they consulted the very same authors, from whom they formed such different judgments on the heathen theology. *e. g.* The learned Dr. CUDWORTH, in his *intellectual system* has laboured to prove “ that the *Jupiter* of the
“ *Gentile* world was the one true God,
“ worshipped both by the philosophers
“ and by the people; and that their different divinities were only different
“ names and manifestations of the one
“ true God.” And yet he acknowledges,
“ that the civil theology of the pagans, as
“ well as the poetical, had not only many
“ fantastic gods in it, but an appearance
“ of a plurality of *independent* deities.”

Thus

Thus absurd and contradictory are his ideas of the *Gentile* theology. And a modern able defender of revelation * has abundantly shewn, that the *Doctor's* hypothesis, of which he was extremely fond, is insupportable.

Another learned pen, *viz.* that of the late Dr. SYKES, has been employed in an attempt to prove, that the doctrine of the *unity* and perfections of God was the universal doctrine of the pagans; and that it was derived to them, not from revelation or tradition, but from the mere unassisted light of reason and nature." And yet he says, " that the *Greek* philosophers travelled into *Egypt* to get at the knowledge of the *unity*; and that the most learned, for the most part, were greatly deficient and wrong in their notions of the one supreme God; and that all of them in general were *world worshippers*, who looked upon the several parts of this

* Dr. LELAND.

" material

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“ material system, as parts and members
“ of the divinity.” Here again seems to
be a very manifest contradiction.

To these we may add the present learned
Bishop of GLOUCESTER, “ who has high-
“ ly extolled the *pagan mysteries*, as an ex-
“ pedient provided by the civil authority,
“ both for leading the people to the prac-
“ tice of virtue, and for convincing them
“ of the vanity of the common idolatry
“ and polytheism.” At the same time he
says, “ the *unity* of God, was a secret
“ entrusted with a *very few*; and that in
“ the open worship of paganism, either
“ public or particular, the *creature* was the
“ sole object of adoration.” This surely
is by no means consistent. But it has been
very clearly and fully shewn, in opposition
to that learned writer, “ that the legisla-
“ tors and civil magistrates, who instituted
“ and conducted the *mysteries*, were the
“ great promoters of polytheism, and that
“ those mysteries were designed to increase
“ men’s veneration for the established reli-
“ gion;

“ gion ; so that, instead of being a school
“ of virtue, they were a sink of vice ;
“ for in *Cicero's* time, the terms *mysteries*
“ and *abomination* were almost synoni-
“ mous.” Nay, this very prelate says,
“ the mysteries were sometimes under the
“ patronage of those deities, who were
“ supposed to inspire and preside over
“ sensual passions ; such as *Bacchus*, *Venus*,
“ and *Cupid* ; for all these had their mys-
“ teries : and where was the wonder, if
“ the initiated should be sometimes in-
“ clined to give a loose to those vices, in
“ which the patron god was supposed to
“ delight.”

What can now be said in support of the
objection to *revelation*, because of the dif-
ference of opinion which learned men have
had about the sense of the divine canon ;
when it is so very apparent, that the best
writings of antiquity, as they report the
pagan religious system, have had as contra-
dictory interpretations, even by the most
learned men, not only denominated chris-
tians,

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tians, but Protestants; and by men too who have had the same end in view; *viz.* that of supporting the credit of a divine revelation, by illustrating its reason and evidence.

But I proceed to observe, that a divine revelation having a *moral* end, as its first intention, it may be justly concluded, that men of vicious dispositions and immoral lives, are neither capable of entering into its spirit, nor of seeing its evidence. The venerable author of the gospel institution has led us to this conclusion, by saying, *that whosoever is desirous of doing the will of God, shall know of the doctrine he taught, whether it was of divine authority or not.* It would therefore be very little to the purpose, for us to lay the evidence before the impious and vicious; inasmuch as in proportion to the honesty and virtue of any one human mind, will be all its ability of discerning evidence, and of making experiment of the truth and excellence of the gospel institution; for, verily, the beneficial knowledge of the sacred canon, does absolutely depend
upon

upon its practical effect and influence: that man therefore whose heart and life are made regular and good, by means of gospel instruction, may reasonably be determined to have made a right judgment of its divine teachings; whereas, the most consistent theory of the system, in the speculative idea of any man, if attended with a loose and irregular life, has not any thing in it which can at all avail the professor. Every one must allow, that that man's creed cannot be sound and good, whose life is irregular and bad *.

I would make one more observation, as what shall close this epistle, and that is a *truth* which cannot be too much inculcated, *viz.* “ that the beneficial or saving sense of
“ a divine revelation must be a man's own;
“ the result of a diligent and careful ob-
“ servation; which sense can have no de-
“ pendence on the opinion or judgment of

* Our *English* poet thus expresses himself—

“ *For modes of faith, let zealous bigots fight,*

“ *His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.*”

“ any

“ any other man whatsoever.” Which observation will, of itself, give a reason for the propriety and necessity of different opinions or interpretations of the sacred canon ; since such application is made of the rule, as best suits the capacity, conception, condition, and constituitiounal complexion of each individual. And the very consciousness of being manumitted from all human authority whatsoever, in the province of religion, and of having an absolute independence, is, perhaps, of all others, the most convincing proof of the *divinity* of the gospel system. This should silence the insolent and censorious pen ; since whatever has thrown disgrace, darkness, and confusion on the christian profession, has ever been owing to a violation of the rights of private judgment. It therefore remains a truth, that *diversity* of *opinions* about the sense of the gospel-teachings, can be no objection to their divinity ; inasmuch as such diversity has ever obtained, and must ever obtain in the professing

fessing christian world. Verily, the gospel should be considered, by every man, as a sacred divine canon, or rule of life, expressive of the *truth* and *grace* of the one God; and not as a system of wanton speculation, or wild theory, intended to countenance either the pride of power, the lust of riches, or the ravings of a censorious enthusiasm. It most certainly is a divine directory of human life, a *doomsday* book, which contains the statutes of God's kingdom, from which every man is to form a judgment of his own character, rights, privileges, and final expectations. It is not to be supposed, that this divine juridical book could ever be intended to become the source of angry and furious controversy, or even of doubtful disputation; because every man is equally concerned in this grand charter of universal, invariable, and eternal laws! so that no man has it in his power, as a subject of God's kingdom, to submit his judgment of the sense of this book to any other man whatsoever.

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Which might be certainly concluded from that single consideration of its being calculated to become the *universal* directory of man. The sole reason, therefore, of its not attaining this end, is to be ascribed to men's perversely assuming a sovereignty over the understandings of one another.

In confidence of this truth, I subscribe myself

Yours,

CREDENS.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E XI.

From CREDENS to SCEPTICUS.

Popular systematic divinity has an extravagance from which the infidel has sought a defence.

S I R,

IN my last was considered your great objection to revelation, from the disagreeing opinion of the learned about the sense of the divine canon. The purport of this epistle shall be, to account for the depraved systems of popular religious opinion. And to my purpose, it has been observed by a *conforming Divine*, “ that the numbers of “ *annotations and commentaries, or exposi-* “ *tions* of the sacred scriptures, of late “ years, have exceeded the example of “ former ones; and that one cannot pre- “ sume much in favour of such compila- “ tions as are published with a merely lu-
F “ crative

“ crative view, as many of them undoubt-
 “ edly are ; perhaps the far greater part
 “ would not stand the test of a critical ex-
 “ amination.—Marks of haste, a superfi-
 “ cial acquaintance, and an attachment to
 “ current systems, are common to most of
 “ them ; and the few which leave the
 “ beaten road, deal much in paradoxes
 “ and ill-grounded conjectures. And be-
 “ sides the general disposition to interpret
 “ scripture, either by the *allegorical* or the
 “ *mystical* clues derived from the *Caballa* of
 “ the *Jews*, has produced swarms of vi-
 “ sionaries, who have affixed an infinite
 “ variety of spiritual meanings to the most
 “ ordinary incidents and common occur-
 “ rences, that are to be found in the sacred
 “ writings,” without which, the *priestly*
 office would never have been thought of in
 the christian church, either with a *Pagan*
 or a *Jewish* complexion ; nor would there
 have been found, after the age of the apo-
 stles, men assuming extraordinary illumina-
 tions and divine missions. “ But in this

“ extreme of enthusiastic pride and vanity,
“ numbers have arisen among us, who affect an immediate heavenly commission,
“ and are soon so very successful, from their popularity, as to have their vanity greatly
“ flattered, of being let into *secrets* and
“ *mysteries*, reserved for the edification of
“ their own fraternity, to the exclusion of
“ all others; hence it is that they have
“ been qualified to speak of the literal
“ sense of the moral law, as a *killing letter*,
“ or a *killing ordinance*, that binds us down
“ under the sentence of death; they could
“ not otherwise have spoken of the moral
“ law, as if it was only a *shadow of good*
“ *things to come*.” inasmuch as the moral
law is no other than the very soul and spirit of the gospel instruction; the *end* of the commandment.

But we may not wonder at such absurdity, since these *illuminati* are found discarding reason, and allowing it no place in religion; they are daring enough to reproach that divine bestowment, as carnal and devil-

ish: consequently, such heads of sects and parties are, in their public performances, so far from encouraging their hearers to read the scriptures, and form a judgment for themselves of the sense of the divine canon, that they do most arrogantly claim an *authority* to fix the precise sense of that canon, and thus prescribe what shall be the exact shape and complexion of their orthodox creed.

And yet, not any thing can be more repugnant to the documents both of reason and of revelation; there verily can be no manner or degree of safety in a dependence on what an uninspired teacher advances as his sense of the divine canon, whatever be his learning or his judgment; since no church has, and no protestant church should pretend to have, the power of prescribing either a confession of faith, or a formula of worship for another church; nor even to the members of its own community, farther than they are seen, by those members, to be in perfect agreement with
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the word of God, *that is the common measure of all*; and every individual christian is to form his own judgment and practice by that measure. It is, *Sir*, for want of this *first* principle, that men of a serious turn, and of weak spirits, become susceptible of the first notions that occur to them as religious, by whomsoever suggested; were it not for this error in the first principle, they would not be so sadly exposed to the delusions of pragmatistical pretenders of every denomination.

Thus, you see, we are able to account for the extravagance of popular systematic divinity; opinions of weak and whimsical, else of artful designing men, are made the divine standard; bulky commentaries, stuffed with *allegorical* and *mystical* interpretations, are read, instead of the scriptures in their simplicity; hereby the people are diverted from the pure fountain, and content themselves with drinking of the muddy streams. All this while there is not a greater truth than this, known to be

so by all who ever made the experiment, namely, *that the sacred scriptures do best explain themselves*; they seldom or never fail, in some passages, to account for and clear up what appears more difficult or obscure in others. And one may with well-grounded confidence affirm, that by a rational and religious attention, a fund of divine knowledge may be acquired by those who understand only their mother tongue, to a degree beyond the proficiency of the most profound scholar, who reads them under systematic prejudices and prepossessions.

Every one, who consults the New Testament writings as a divine revelation, intended to be the rule of life and salvation for all who will thus consider them, is capable of receiving far more advantage from that heavenly canon, than any of those fanatics are able to do, who unhappily look upon the scriptures as a *sealed* book, wrapped up in allegory and mystery, which have a recondite meaning, far above the reach of any common understanding; these things,

things, we readily confess, are the true statings of that extravagance which is found in the depraved popular systems of divinity. But it does not hence follow, that because ten thousand absurd opinions have been held, and are yet professed by men who would be denominated christians; it does not amount to a shadow of reason, why the gospel doctrines should be called in question; either as to their divine evidence, or their everlasting importance; forasmuch as these extravagancies have not been occasioned, either in this or in any past age, by a fair, rational, and honest examination of the written canon; but from the amazing folly and wantonness of men's forming their opinions, either upon their own wild conceits, else upon the whimsies and resveries of one another.

What then, if some very gloomy minds have apprehended the Deity to be wrathful and inexorable; and that nothing but blood could appease him? so thought the idolatrous pagan before him. And what if he

should fancy that the blood of *Jesus*, though shed by the most wicked hands, was the placating appeasing sacrifice? will it follow, that this extravagance can fasten on the New Testament doctrine, when *Jesus* himself has declared, that *God's love of the world* was the cause of his mission? and when apostles do expressly declare, that the gospel scheme of reconciliation, was, not of *God* to the world, but of the world unto *God*. Or, does the selfish, contracted *predestinarian* fancy the Creator capricious in bestowing his favours, in having decreed some to happiness, and others to misery? The New Testament writings never teach any such doctrine; but that *God would have all men come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved*. Or, has the indolent *Solifidian* dreamed of faith alone justifying? an apostle would teach him better, who every where reports saving faith as productive of all the fruits of holiness. And once more, will the proud, daring *Antinomian* be confident, that the
law,

law, the moral law, is not the rule of life to the christian? the gospel will tell him, that *Jesus* did not come to relax, but to confirm the law. And an apostle, as well as his Lord and Master, will assure him, *that every man shall receive according to the deeds done in his body, whether good or bad, and that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.* Thus obvious it is, that there is an essential manifest difference between enthusiastic opinion, and the rational teachings of the sacred canon; and as great a difference too between ecclesiastical and evangelical obedience. There is therefore no charge that can lie against the revelation, because of the absurdity and extravagance of popular opinion.

This is the judgment formed by,

Yours,

CREDENS.

E P I S T L E XII.

From CREDENS to SCEPTICUS.

*Claims of spiritual power among protestants,
a fatal occasion of infidelity.*

S I R,

YOUR last remarks on the present state of the protestant world require some serious animadversion. Though I am constrained to own, that the removal of this cause of infidelity does not, at present, seem probable. Indeed the origin of this evil of which you complain, will carry us as far back as the *fourth* century, and fix our eyes on the undue compliments paid to christian bishops, or elders, by the emperor *Constantine*, thence called the great. An acknowledgment of their having a spiritual dominion, became the fatal occasion of so much unaccountable insolence, and fed the pride and haughtiness of a christian clergy. The very idea of
an

an *hierarchy*, as if the christian church could be formed upon the plan of judaism, or of paganism, would of itself support the pretensions to an exercise of priestly dominion. But because our Lord told *Peter*, that he would give him the KEYS, therefore men have imagined themselves his successors, and to have derived from him a power of binding and loosing; *i. e.* of admitting into, else of excluding from, the kingdom of heaven. Whereas, those figurative expressions, *of giving to Peter the keys*, did not import any sort of spiritual power over the consciences of men, or the least ability of determining the final fates of any. They could have no meaning further than this; *viz.* that *Peter* should have the honour of opening the doctrine of the resurrection, both to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*. In point of *authority*, he had no pre-eminence to any of the other apostles, though he had in the prior execution of the apostolic office; and this priority was unavoidable; since some one must begin to publish the

resurrection of a crucified *Jesus*, and *Peter* is appointed to this purpose; but in the performance of that office, *Peter*, thus commissioned, is not capable of imparting one moral virtue, or a single rewardable disposition to any man. In this respect, *neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth is any thing. Who is Paul? who Apollos? who Cephas?* consequently, there were no divine investiture of spiritual powers or dominion over the human mind, by the keys being given to this apostle.

However, the sons of pride and ambition would so understand the *doctrine of the keys*; and, accordingly, have erected an hierarchy in the christian church. The wretchedness and slavery, occasioned by this exorbitant claim of spiritual power, did excite originally that very signal and illustrious opposition which gave name and being to the protestant world. One would, therefore, have thought, that the evil thus abhorred and protested against would have had no place among the reformed churches. But, alas! the reformation from popery was,

was, by no means, so complete and perfect; for even protestants do pretend to the exercise of spiritual powers, and are tenaciously fond of prescribing articles of faith, a rule of discipline, together with a form of worship. Had not this been the case, the popish author of a late publication, called, *The History of the Life of Cardinal Pole*, would never have had the confidence to condemn the Reformation*. However, I would observe to you, *Sir*, that there is another jesuitical performance, already referred to in these letters, that boldly affirms a complete agreement between popery and the present *English* church establishment. Allow me to make the citation at large.—“ The clergy of the
“ established church, *he says*, received the
“ sacred Deposit of the Old and New
“ Testament from their Roman catholic

* “ This history, say the *Critical Reviewers*, is
“ the most impudent as well as ill judged insult
“ that was ever offered to the understanding of a
“ people.” See for *January 1765*.

“ predecessors.

“ predecessors. It is from them also they
 “ are ambitious of deriving their mission
 “ and ordination. And the labours of fa-
 “ ther *Courayer*, for that purpose, have
 “ been received with applause. Every
 “ positive article of belief is, in like man-
 “ ner, taken from the Roman catholic
 “ faith; and besides the holy bible, the
 “ rule of that faith remains in part the
 “ same; as the *apostles creed*, the *Athana-*
 “ *sian creed*, the *four first general councils*,
 “ a regard for the *authority of antient fa-*
 “ *thers of the church*. There is also near-
 “ ly the same *hierarchy*, the order of bi-
 “ shops, priests, and deacons; and the
 “ like canons for fixing the subordination
 “ of ecclesiastical discipline. The same
 “ books are put into the hands of the laity,
 “ *the Whole Duty of Man*, *Thomas à Kem-*
 “ *pis*, *the Introduction to a devout Life*; and
 “ many books of that sort, translated by
 “ Dr. *Stanhope*, and other eminent divines.
 “ Likewise the having a set form of public
 “ prayer, a very little variation in the
 “ prayers

“ prayers themselves, except the difference
“ of language, and what regards the inter-
“ cession of saints. The more minute and
“ ceremonial part of the former worship
“ has also been preserved; the particular
“ decent garb of ecclesiastics, the use of
“ the surplice, of the sign of the cross in
“ baptism, bowing at the name of *Jesus*;
“ the same days are allotted for com-
“ memorating the mysteries of the chris-
“ tian religion; organs, bells, and even
“ placing the communion table, the situ-
“ ation of which was regulated several dif-
“ ferent ways in *Edward* the VIth's reign;
“ but when the church of *England* was
“ established, it was fixed in the old place,
“ and restored by some to its more solemn
“ name of *altar**.”

My business here, is not to shew the inconsistency of two popish writers; the one impudently condemning the *Reformation*; the other as peremptorily denying, that

* *Considerations on the penal Laws against Roman Catholics*, p. 63, 64. Published by *Doddsley*.

any very material or significant alteration has thereby been made in the protestant church system. What I aim at, is, to prove, that so far as the exercise of power over conscience does remain among protestants, so far the Reformation is undoubtedly trifling and imperfect; and must be matter of great offence to every rational inquirer into the christian profession.

If therefore similar claims to the exercise of spiritual power be yet founded in priestly pretensions to *confer grace*, to *confirm saints*, to *absolve sinners*, and to *anathematize and excommunicate* for disobedience to church-canon, I would ask, whether it would not be natural for men to reason thus—"Is it not impossible but that the antient clergy might be possessed with the same spirit of pride and arrogance? And if those writings which the present clergy do call *holy scripture*, are of their side, and do countenance such exertions of priestly or prelatical power, I can make no doubt but they were of
their

“ their own inventing; and if *Jesus Christ*,
“ their patron, laid the foundation of those
“ exorbitant powers over the human mind,
“ which both popish and protestant clergy
“ do claim to themselves under his autho-
“ rity, I should be inclined to think,
“ that the old *Romans* did him justice in
“ punishing him with the death of a
“ *slave*.”

Certain it is, that authority exercised over conscience, in all matters of faith and worship, must be incompatible with the nature of man, considered as rational, social, and moral. In support of this, I will cite the observations of a very distinguished genius, and celebrated writer—“ the law of
“ society, says he, can have no other foun-
“ dation, in any case, than the law of
“ nature; *do not that to another, which*
“ *thou wouldst not be should do to thee*, is
“ the great and universal principle of both
“ throughout the whole earth: now, agree-
“ able to this principle, can one man say
“ to another, *believe that which I believe*,
“ *and*

“ *and which thou thyself canst not believe,*
 “ *or thou shalt die?* and yet, this is what
 “ every day is said in *Portugal*, in *Spain*,
 “ and at *Goa*. In some other countries,
 “ indeed, they now content themselves
 “ with saying, *believe as I do, else I will*
 “ *hold thee in abhorrence; believe like me,*
 “ *else I will do thee all the evil I can:*
 “ *wretch! thou art not of my religion, and*
 “ *therefore thou hast no religion at all, and*
 “ *oughtest to be held in execration by thy*
 “ *neighbours, thy city, and thy province.*
 “ If the law of society directs such a con-
 “ duct, the *Japanese* ought to hold the
 “ *Chinese* in detestation; and the latter the
 “ *Siamese*, who should persecute the inha-
 “ bitants of *Ganges*; and they fall upon
 “ them of *India*; the *Mogul* should put
 “ to death the first *Malabar* he found in
 “ his kingdom; the *Malabar* should poi-
 “ son the *Persian*; the *Persian* massacre
 “ the *Turk*; and all together fall upon us
 “ christians, who have for many ages been
 “ cutting

“cutting one another’s throats*.” I will only add,

The argument for the exercise of priestly spiritual authority, was urged, perhaps as far as it could be carried, among men who pretend to protestantism, by arch-deacon JONAS PROAST †, and met with a most masterly refutation in LOCKE’S *Letters on Toleration*; which are well known to the most able advocates of liberty throughout the *European* christian world. And, in truth, it will be of little avail for any to complain of the growth of infidelity, so long as pretensions are made, by protestant professors of christianity, to the exercise of a spiritual jurisdiction and sovereignty over the human mind.

Allow me, *Sir*, to conclude this epistle with a short citation or two, one made from

* *Voltaire* on Toleration.

† See preface to the new edition of *Locke’s Letters on Toleration*.

the late learned and ingenious Dr. *Conyers Middleton*—"AUTHORITY, says he, is a
 "treacherous guide to a searcher after
 "truth; and *theories*, in all sciences, the
 "chief obstacles of real knowledge."
 The other, from a singular female genius,
 and advocate of liberty, who has made
 this very *masterly* observation; "Super-
 "stition, says she, that weakness insepa-
 "rable from the mind of man, has, from
 "the first period of recorded time, been
 "the quality the most fatally instrumental
 "in degrading his nature to an abject, yet
 "willing dependence on the creature of
 "his own rank; and overturning divine
 "and moral law, has fixed an acknow-
 "ledged inferiority, where God has
 "marked equality. Every established
 "form of worship has, for these reasons,
 "been subordinate to the purposes of po-
 "licy; and the engine *religion* been used
 "with never failing success to enslave the
 "many to the few, and to fix on the firm
 "basis of conscience, *tyrannies* irrecon-
 "cileable

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“ cileable to the wisdom of God, the dig-
“ nity of human nature, and the welfare
“ of mankind *.”

I remain,

Sir,

Your devoted Servant,

CREDENS.

* Mrs. Macaulay's History of England, vol. ii.
P. 57.

EPISTLE

E P I S T L E XIII.

From CREDENS to SCEPTICUS.

A mechanical apparatus has corrupted and spoiled the christian devotion; yet a beneficial use might be made of the CRUCIFIX.

S I R,

THE New Testament, that only divine canon of the christian's faith and worship, is a perfect stranger to the use of *pictures* or *images*, as means of either exciting or enlivening devotion. There is a purity, simplicity, and spirituality in all the representation which it makes of an acceptable homage. Every man therefore who worships by the direction of *Jesus Christ*, or of his apostles, as he can have no other object than *the one God, the Father*, who is a spirit of inconceivable perfection of nature, and also of immensity of presence! hence a reasonable homage must

must be *in spirit and in truth*: for since the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, and since he dwelleth not in temples made with hands*, neither is worshipped by mens hands, as though he needed any thing, (as the ignorant idolatrous pagan had vainly imagined, and also as the superstitious Jew had as vainly fancied) we have nothing to offer him but the humble sense of our own demerits, wants, and weaknesses; the grateful acknowledgments of his adorable benignity and goodness; together with earnest supplications of his favour, and devout expressions of our reverence and hope, confidence, delight, and joy in him.

The christian behaving thus, is said to pray *in the name of* Jesus; because he directs his homage according to that rule of homage which the gospel prescribes: and in his address he thus owns the authority of the one Lord, who has shewn him the

* *Israel* had a national temple; but then *Israel* had a local presence of the glory. Such presence is no more; *ergo*—

Father.

Father. The principles on which he conducts his homage, are, *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*; which faith implies obedience to the whole law of truth and righteousness. The well-informed christian has no other dependence on divine favour, than what arises from acquired rectitude and personal holiness; in other words, from a sincere chosen devotedness to all his will.

We may proceed to observe, the christian has no expectation of benefit from the administration of the one Lord, but what derives from this reason or source; since *Jesus* has declared expressly, that no man can be interested in him, but as he does the will of his heavenly father; and that he will finally reject all workers of iniquity, even though they have wrought miracles in his name.

This is the plain, simple, uniform doctrine of the New Testament; therefore *pictures and images*, when used either to excite or to enliven devotion, have nothing
at

at all to countenance them in the divine canon; consequently, they can be no other than a *mechanical apparatus*, which corrupts and debauches the human mind in all its expressions of homage.

But because numerous artificers, craftsmen of celebrated character, in former ages, such as *painters* and *sculptors* of great genius, found their account in furnishing materials for the ornament and embellishment of pagan idolatrous temples; and because the priest has been better enabled thereby to amuse, blind, and captivate the ignorant, and passive idolater; hence, in all countries, we meet with the artificial representations of numberless deities which mankind have adored. What wonder then, if we find the Pantheon of *Ephesus* or of *Rome* enriched with pictures and statues?

Unhappily for the cause of christianity, its professors did very soon paganise, both by multiplying objects of worship, and by the use of images in their devotion! which

gave the subtle impostor, MAHOMET, so much advantage over the corrupt system of christian worship; an emphasis being laid in almost every chapter of his *Koran*, upon God's having no partners, and upon the prohibition of a use of images in devotion. Verily, thus it was he became so successful in the claim which he made to a divine information.

POPERY, as well as superstition among christians, has been, in fact, every where propagated by the means of a mechanical apparatus; and it is by this very means, that the designing priest draws away the minds of men from the simplicity, purity, and spirituality of gospel worship, even by a vast variety of sensible striking representations. In a thousand articles of bewitching imaginary address to the sensitive organ of the eye, has the human heart been polluted with gross fable and fiction. But because of the exquisitely fine strokes of the pencil, or the masterly hand of the chissel, men have gazed and admired! and the ignorant deluded

deluded creature has been betrayed into a train of credulity, the most enormous and astonishing !

I shall, *Sir*, take you by the hand, and lead you into the beauties of holiness. Forgive me the phrase, I mean only to refer you to a new popish publication, called, *the Beauties of Antwerp*. If you will keep your eye upon it, you may soon run over a very copious and concise specimen of a mechanical apparatus for devotion ; a variegated sample, or quintessence of the *raree-show* of idolatry. It opens with a description of the *cathedral* dedicated to our LADY. Such dedication cannot surprise you, when you once recollect that popery has her principal dependence, throughout her whole plan of devotion, upon the very soothing complimentary addresses which are made to a woman ; for which reason you have her image and altar decorated with more expensive ornament, and honoured with more numerous devotees ; ay, and

more fervent approaches too than any other image or altar.

In this cathedral devoted to her ladyship, there is a distinct altar for *merciers, coopers, gunsmiths, fusiliers, taylor, schoolmasters, masons, shoemakers, vintners, furriers, painters and sculptors, joiners, antient bowyers, and modern bowyers, brokers, gardeners, farriers, weavers, and even surgeons*. Each of these professions, I say, have a distinct altar. Methinks they should have added an altar for the sons of *music and song*, and thus have made her the smiling goddess of the whole machinery of a mechanical devotion. You will, in almost every department of her temple, discover a very darling favourite picture to be, *the Virgin with the infant Jesus on her lap*; no doubt, the better to inculcate the idea of her maternal authority over him. In the *church of the Jesuits*, you astonishingly meet, “ a representation of the Blessed Virgin, with her child Jesus, appearing in the clouds to St. Ignatius”. This was done by *Alexander*

On the evidence for revelation. 125.
ander van Papenboven, and Hamers. Jesus
Christ must therefore remain, you see, un-
der her perfect management, however ex-
alted he is in the heavens.

Other representations are made of a *dead*
Jesus; one in the church of the *Carmelites*,
describes him in the arms of his heavenly
Father; done by *Reubens*. Another by the
same *Reubens*, near the altar of the wood-
mongers, in the aforesaid cathedral, lean-
ing on the bosom of his mother. And in
the *church of the Capuchins*, there is the
dead body of Jesus extended on the lap of
his mother; by *Anthony van Dyck*.

There should seem to be supreme ho-
nours also paid to the Virgin, in the *Fort*
church; for, “ in the centre of the cha-
“ pel, the holy Trinity are represented; on
“ one side is seen the *blest Virgin* accom-
“ panied by angels; and on the other, a
“ multitude of souls as in purgatory, to
“ whom the angels are supposed paying a
“ charitable visit, in order to deliver them
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“ charitable visit, in order to deliver them
“ out of their insupportable torment.”

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This is executed by *Scheemaekers*. Here the angels see it far more promising and efficacious to be making their application to the Virgin, than to the Trinity.

But in the *church of the Recollects* “near
“ the altar of *St. Anthony*, is the body of
“ Christ taken down from the cross, ex-
“ tended on the lap of his disconsolate
“ mother; on one side are several angels
“ in tears!” This is said to be one of the
best performances of *Anthony van Dyck*. I mention this as in proof of an high devotion paid to the Virgin; for I can never believe the painter thought that angels could possibly shed tears, but at the sight of a fine woman’s deep distress. No wonder they have such devout attachments to her ladyship; as that you above explore angels in her levee; and not in waiting on the Trinity, in the chapel of *Fort church*.

A farther observation I would make, and that is, the superior benevolence and philanthropy of the Virgin to that of Jesus Christ. This you will have expressed by

Reubens,

Reubens, in the church of the Dominicans, where, "on the one hand, Jesus Christ is "represented as in wrath, threatening to "punish a sinful world; on the other, the "blessed Virgin accompanied by a great "number of saints, imploring him, if it "be his blessed will, to suspend his indignation." Here it is evident, that he is absolutely divested of the character of a powerful intercessor, able and willing to save to the utmost all that come unto God by him; he is stripped quite naked of the character of SAVIOUR. And the Virgin, by virtue of her more exalted goodness and amazing clemency, becomes a prevalent advocate in behalf of mankind. You may not suppose him undutiful to his mother. Will any one say, that these representations are not in full proof of the most deplorable corruptions of the human mind, occasioned by a mechanical apparatus in devotion?

I shall proceed to make some other observations nearer home. And, verily, *protes-*

tants have too much caught the infection; they undoubtedly have, so far as they can imagine any holiness in place, in persons, in garments, or in utensils, from priestly consecrations. It should be enough to give the protestant an abhorrence of these things from the popish fondness of them, and from the dependence which is unhappily made by an ignorant vulgar upon them. For, assuredly, there is not any thing which can belong to real holiness, but what is personal; *i. e.* nothing but what derives from moral attainments.—What a contemptible figure, then, *do* those learned men make, who have so long contended for *indelible character*? By some strictures, the very pretence to give law to conscience, even almost begins to raise a *nausea* in the breast of the more enlightened papist.

But because our own people have become dissolute in principles and manners, because both our great and small vulgar have learnt to trample under foot all the
laws

laws of decency and order, and are glad of some cover or refuge, to appease and quiet conscience, and to sing a *requiem* to their souls, in the approaches of peril, infirmity, and mortality; hence the artful popish priest has laid fast hold on many of our gay, worldly, and sensual spirits; depending on the benefit of an absolution, or *extreme unction*, they go on in all their debaucheries, and are able to hold up their heads under their audacious impieties.

To execute these Jesuitical schemes with more address, the people have been prepared to relish most favourably the mechanical apparatus for devotion: and where they have no present hopes of persuading them to quit their bibles, they have prevailed with them, to consider the *sacred canon* itself as of less value when unornamented with cuts and pictures, than when these great improvements are made to that most divine book. Thus have they invented a method of reconciling a people to all the mummeries of a mechanical devotion. What
else

else can possibly be the meaning of this modish way of rendering that best book in the world, the play-thing, or the toy of children?

As well might a *crucifix* be recommended, as proper to excite and enliven devotion. And yet, assured I am, that the most natural and useful idea that could be raised in my mind, from such emblematical representation, would be this, *viz.* “that whenever any people are under “clerical or priestly influence, whenever “they will resign their understandings, in “religious matters, and blindly follow “ecclesiastical leaders, they may very soon “be persuaded to persecute, even unto “death, the most amiable, beneficent, “and finished character.” I appeal, *Sir*, to you, and to all mankind, who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, whether this be not the most obvious, and most useful instruction conveyed by the sight of a *crucifix*.—And, verily, the doctrine of that far more useful memorial of his death, which
Jesús

Jesus Christ himself has appointed, and which christians do reasonably and religiously celebrate, *viz.* the *eucharist*, is expressive of a man's obtaining life-principles, by mortifying all worldliness, and by becoming superior to all its contempt, hatred, and abuse. Whereas the *crucifix* has a more proper tendency to raise horror, than reverence; to excite indignation, rather than admiration. As a *charm*, there is nothing of virtue can derive from it, but what ignorance and infatuation does produce. And yet men are persuaded to kiss, hug, and lay it in their bosoms, as if the most execrable accursed instrument of torture, on which a divinely amiable character was suspended, is become worthy of the warmest devout affection. We may however be well assured, that when mankind will once begin to reason in matters of religion, the sorcery or enchantment of the crucifix will be as much detested and abhorred, as it is now devoutly honoured and revered. For if you look
into

into the *Church of the Friars of St. Augustine at Antwerp*, you will be shewn a *crucifix*, painted by *Anthony van Dyck*, which is said to be “an exquisite performance, and also to DEMAND THE UTMOST ATTENTION.” Oh, the beauties of *Antwerp*!

By this time, I would hope, *Sir*, that you plainly perceive, there is not any truth more evident, than that the more men are trained to a mechanical passionate devotion, the less will they understand or be able to enter into the nature and spirit of gospel-worship. For in proportion to a man's being occupied in the machinery of sensitive representation, will the rational, spiritual, and pure attentions of the mind be precluded and shut out from the service; or, in the phrase of an apostle, it will in fact become *carnal* and *bodily*. On the reverse, religious worship, when rightly performed, is no other than the mental exertions of reason and understanding, excited by just conceptions and apprehensions of GOD, from views taken of man's daily dependence and the infinitude of his obligations.

gations. In this exertion of the intellectual faculties and powers, we can have no kind of reliance on the *merits* either of this, that, or the other saint. Neither can we avail ourselves at all of the divine approbation, from the *interest* which any other being has with the sovereign; but our sole dependence on the divine favour and mercy, must be grounded in our own personal piety, and upon an acquired moral established rectitude. This being the truth of the case, what becomes of all the *MASS*ES performed by monks, friars, and priests? And how vain and delusory, impious and idolatrous, the *ave maries* which make up the greater part of papal devotion? May we not then conclude, that not only popish, but every other superstition falls at the foot of *truth*; and the artificial mechanical apparatus of devotion, wholly dies away at the divine approach of *reason*.

The argument thus conducted on the side of revelation, may, perhaps, from its brevity, plainness, and freedom, be of use

to

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to *remove* the prejudices of some against christianity; *abate* those of others; and, in younger minds, *prevent* that wrong train of ideas which are apt to lead to indifference, scepticism, and infidelity. In one word, *I would not be found one of the servants that slept whilst the enemy was sowing the tares.* God knows this was the motive I had to this publication. If any good shall be done hereby to the cause of real rational religion, the desire will be gratified, and the end answered, of,

Sir,

Your affectionate, devoted,



humble servant,

CREDENS.

